Tibet.

THE SCAPE-GOAT IN WESTERN TIBET. *By the N. India.*

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96 The releasing of a scape-goat is thought by the peasants of Western Tibet to be an effective means of obtaining absolution from the moral impurities in the individual or the community.

Noxious diseases, failure of the crops, or some catastrophic event which have thrown the community into confusion, are the chief reasons assigned for employing the scape-goat as a vehicle for carrying off the moral rubbish and transferring it elsewhere.

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A learned lama informed me that in Central Tibet it is customary for the ecclesiastics to set free a scape-man triennially. The purpose of this practice is to absolve themselves, and incidentally the community as a whole, of an evil influence which is supposed to militate against the well-being of the country and its people. The scape-man thus chosen is usually a destitute or criminally-disposed person for whom the community has no use. The ceremony of *Tsay-tar* (saving one's life) is then performed, when the scape-man is lavishly fed, adorned with ornaments, supplied with money and provided with a pony and comforts for the journey and released. He must wander for the rest of his life, in foreign countries, with no expectation of ever visiting his native land. It is said that the scape-man rarely lives long, for he

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either dies prematurely through disease, or meets a tragic end through his own or someone else's fault.

When releasing a scape-goat (or sometimes a scape-sheep) the following is the ritual at the ceremony of *Tsay-tar*. The diseased or noxious person brings a goat led by a black rope before the community. A man then, stepping up to the animal, simulates cutting its throat with his hunting knife. In the meanwhile the owner of the goat pleads loud and long that the animal be spared, promising to pay compensation in money or kind provided that no blood is shed. The goat is now regarded as a fitting substitute for the penalty which should otherwise be paid for the sins of the individual or community, since it must undergo banishment from the flock. When the amount of money to be exacted from the owner of the goat is decided, the black rope is substituted for a white one, and this is tied round the neck of the animal. It is then gaily adorned, well fed, and driven to the hills to wander hither and thither until the cause of its banishment is removed. During the period of exile, no one may place a load on the scape-goat, nor even so much as touch it. If the animal should die before the moral impurity of the community is purged, another scape-goat is chosen, though the ceremony of *Tsay-tar* is not repeated.

There seems to be no regularity in Western

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Tibet as regards the performance of this ceremony of releasing a scape-goat, for this is contingent on the moral condition of the community. The imposition of this form of

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absolution for the sins of the people rests in the hands of the lamas (priests), whose function it is to decide whether or not such ceremony should be performed.